

# The unmasking of a Monopolie :

## OR THE

# CLOTHIERS PETITION



Examined & Answered.

*Jan 1647*  
**A** Bout Hilary Terme 1646, a Petition was presented to the Honourable House of Commons, in the name of the Clothiers and Manufacturers of Wooll in this Kingdome; which being referred unto a Committee, was by the Petitioners Councell divided into foure parts; viz. Against, 1. Corrupters. 2. Transporters. 3. Ingrossers of Wooll. 4. Such as used Clothing, and had not served as Apprentices to the Trade.

Of these foure, three were quieted so soone as mentioned, divers Statutes now in force restraining the same: But the other, touching the supposed ingrossing gave cause of debate thus; The Petitioners alleadged, that the Staplers and others were Ingrossers of Wooll, and thereupon the Petitioners desired that none but themselves might buy Wooll; And that the Merchants of the Staple, and all others, might be prohibited the buying of Wooll: And in this request they had woven another as dangerous, viz. that Commissioners and Officers might be authorized to search Wools, and put those former Lawes in execution; That such Commissioners and Officers might be paid by the Petitioners, and that they might be those persons as promoted this Petition: A proposition as bold in them as prejudiciall to the Common-wealth: And in their proceeding and debate herein, which was insisted upon with some vehemencie, they called up three principall Opponents.

1. The Fellmonger of London for whom it was alleadged, That he used, and that it was his Trade, to buy and sell Fleece-wooll, as well as to pluck and sell Fell-wooll.

2. The Merchant of the Staple, he shewes and proves,

1. That the sole Emption of Wooll desired by the Petitioners is a Monopoly, especially if that of their Officers and Searchers accompanie it; That its against Law and the Liberty of the Subject.

2. That this project of the rich Clothier, will undoe all the poore manufactures of Wooll.

3. That its destructive to the very being of the Stapler; whose Art and profession is to buy Wooll where he pleaseth, and by his skill and labour to sort it into 5, 6. or more severall sorts, so to prepare and fit it for all uses, and then to furnish those that drape it, dwelling in the remotest parts of the Kingdome.

4. That hereby the Manufacturers have no losse in the Wooll they use, but save the disbursement of 15 l. in 20 l. For they are stored by the Stapler for 5 l. with as much serviceable Wooll of severall sorts as would cost 20 l. from the grower.

5. As the Wooll of (few or) no Countrey can be spent by any one Manufacturer: so all the Wools of every Countrey by the Art and industry of the Merchant of the Staple are made usefull for every Clothier and Manufacturer of Wooll in all parts of England and Wales, and with much advantage both in respect of stock and otherwise.

6. The objection that the Merchant of the Staple is an Ingrosser is absurd; for to buy and sell and sort Wooll in his Trade, (which he doth at all times of the yeare) is no ingrossing. It may be as well applyed to a Cheesemonger, Silkman, or Goldsmith, who must have more Cloth, Plate, Silke, Butter and Cheese then for his owne expence; And may by Law buy as much and as great quantities as his Stock and credit will extend unto, and yet no Ingrosser.

7. The Staplers are an ancient Body incorporated 15 Edw. 3. & after the surprize of Callice, 3 Eliz. both which Charters are confirmed by severall Acts of Parliament, wherby and by another Charter 15. Jas. as they are inabled to buy Wooll, so none are prohibited to buy any Wooll: wherefore now to prohibit the Staplers, is, to drive them and their servants to seeke a new course of life; against Law.

3. The Wooll-grower, who of all Parties, is, for Number most considerable: He by severall Petitions made at the publike Assises, by the Justices and grand-Jury in severall Counties, and delivered in to the said Committee, by the Parliament-men serving for those Counties, doth affirme;

1. That the Petitioners suit is for a Monoplie; And that they seek to doe mischief by a Law.

2. That to compell them to sell to the Clothier and Manufacturer of Wooll only, is to leave them only but one Chapman, which is against Law and Liberty of the Subject, and must of necessity abase the price of Wooll.

3. That in such case the Clothier may buy what Wooll he list, and when he pleaseth, and at his owne price by a combination amongst them, which in part they have already practised in Northampton-shire.

4. That the Stat. 5. Ed. 6. cap. 7. afforded them two Chapmen, the Clothier and the Stapler, which they found to be too few, and thereupon 21 Jas. they made suit to repeale that Law: But if the Stapler shall be debarred, and the Clothier only buy Wooll, what will become of them then?

Ob. The Clothier saith he petitioneth not against the Gent. Grower.

Ans. No good man, he petitioneth not against him, he would only make him keep his Wooll till it Rot, or take the Clothiers bafe price for it, that is all which the Petitioner desires.

So the Clothier petitioneth not against the Corporation of the Merchants of the Staple; But he labours all he can, that the Stapler may lose his Trade and beg, though it be to the detriment of the whole Kingdome.

The Clothier hath also another Opponent, very numerous, called Jobbers and Broggers, who of late yeares have been great buyers of Wooll, being men of all Professions; as Glovers, Wooll-winders, Taylors, Inne-keepers and the like, who appeared not in person, nor any in their behalfe but only by Petition; there being no Law for them, and they craving none, lest it should be made against them.